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V CORPS ARTILLERY SOLDIERS SEND THUNDEROUS VOLLEY 'DOWNRANGE' DURING LIVE-FIRE TRAINING

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GRAFENWOEHR, Germany — Nearly a month of field training here was capped with a unique and thunderous volley, as a line of Multiple Launch Rocket System launchers simultaneously blasted live rockets “downrange” at the command of the Soldiers of V Corps’ 1st Battalion, 27th Field Artillery.

The exercise, called “Gridsmasher Thunder,” was the premier training event of the year for the “Make It Happen” battalion that is based in Babenhausen, Germany. The battalion, recently returned from a year-long deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, experienced a large personnel turnover upon redeployment and had a lot of new Soldiers to train.



SPC KRISTOPHER JOSEPH

A line of Multiple Launch Rocket System launchers from V Corps’ 1st Battalion, 27th Field Artillery sends a barrage of rockets onto a target at the Grafenwoehr (Germany) Training Area on the final day of the month-long battalion training exercise ‘Gridsmasher Thunder.’

“We still have quite a few veterans in the unit,” said Staff Sgt. Michael Bowen, an ammunition section chief. “For this exercise we’re teaming up a lot of the new guys

with the vets so they can get them up to speed and prepared for the next deployment."

An MLRS unit is comprised of two teams working together for the same goal: to land rockets on an enemy. The ammo team troops are responsible for maintaining and supplying rockets for the MLRS vehicle. Being on an ammo team is a "rite of passage" to getting on an MLRS vehicle team.

"Having two teams creates a lot of teamwork in our unit," said ammo team member Pfc. Samuel Deiwert. "We might not get the glory of an MLRS team, but in the end we know that they can't do their job without us."



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Pfc. Jesse Mercado, ammunition team member for V Corps' 1st Battalion, 27th Field Artillery prepares to reload a Multiple Launch Rocket System launcher during the battalion's recent month-long training exercise at the Grafenwoehr (Germany) Training Area.

Deiwert said the ammo teams like to get down and dirty, which might explain why they call themselves "ammo dawgs."

The vehicle team – or the "glory boys," as their comrades like to call them – are the guys who actually shoot the rockets; a three-Soldier team that operates from within each MLRS launcher vehicle to engage targets.

Composed of a driver, gunner and crew chief, the team works in concert to get to a tactical location, receive a fire order, lock on a target and destroy it.

The MLRS is equipped to fire up to 12 rockets from a static or moving position and perform missions such as suppressing enemy air defense artillery; counter-firing on enemy MLRS or firing on high-value targets such as fuel convoys or command posts.

Battalion operations officer Maj. Ram Reinhard spoke about the effectiveness of the MLRS in combat.

"One of the rockets we fire explodes 1,000 feet in the air over a target and drops hundreds of small bomblets that can cover an area of about three football fields," he said. "We used this rocket repeatedly on Iraqi air defense artillery and they (Iraqis) started calling it 'steel rain' because of its blast radius."

It's also how the unit earned the name "Gridsmashers" – from the ability to blanket an area as large as a map grid square with its deadly fire.

The major said Gridsmasher Thunder is a chance for the battalion to get back to the basics and train for future deployments. Prior to the live-fire, the battalion trained from the top of the chain of command down to the newest private, going over battle drills and field tasks that will make them ready for any contingency on any terrain.

"The battalion has not live-fired since OIF," said Reinhard. "And with all the new personnel I wasn't sure how everything was going to turn out, but in the end all of our Soldiers and officers were well trained and they made it happen."

The 1-27th concluded the exercise with that massive "thunder strike," with all 18 of the battalion's MLRS launchers lining up across the training area and firing simultaneously on a single target.

"For the Soldiers this is the fun part," Reinhard said. "Rockets, smoke, flames and fire: This is what our Soldiers live for."

